POWERFUL PEOPLE:
Building Leadership for Healthy Communities

A Curriculum Workbook
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Acknowledgements

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Preface

CENTRAL CALIFORNIA REGIONAL OBESITY PREVENTION PROGRAM

The Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program (CCROPP) works to create healthier communities by fostering change in systems, environments and policies. A particular emphasis of CCROPP’s work has been placed on communities disproportionately affected by obesity: low-income people of color living in under-resourced communities.

Historically, obesity has been addressed through interventions that focus on individual education and behavior change. Although education is important, the influence that food and physical activity environments have on behavior is often overlooked. CCROPP is committed to addressing obesity through place-based policy change that supports healthy eating and active living throughout California’s Central Valley.

This unique, comprehensive approach is being carried out by partnerships between public health departments, community-based organizations and grassroots community members in the San Joaquin Valley. The program was developed by the Central California Public Health Partnership, a partnership comprised of eight public health directors in our region, and is administered through the Public Health Institute. Funding for this initiative was made possible by The California Endowment and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

CCROPP’s history of developing promising interventions and strategies that benefit the most in need, is helping to create a culture of healthier communities across the San Joaquin Valley. Through CCROPP’s efforts, schools and communities are working together to help ensure that only healthy foods and beverages are offered at school and that school spaces are opened as safe places for physical activity. City officials and planners are helping to improve community designs, complete streets and enhance park and recreational amenities. Farmers and growers are working in communities to provide access to affordable fresh fruits and vegetables. Community members are joining together to advocate for healthier communities. These are the seeds of a movement that is growing throughout our region.
Powerful People: Building Leadership for Healthy Communities

*Powerful People: Building Leadership for Healthy Communities* strives to empower underrepresented community voices and support effective community engagement, aimed towards healthier and equitable communities. The community leadership and advocacy program helps to prepare emerging community leaders with the skills and tools necessary to foster environmental and policy change.

*Powerful People* is an arm of the community building strategies developed by CCROPP. This initiative is funded by Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s national program to help reverse childhood obesity in communities by 2015, and is co-funded by The California Endowment.

This curriculum was developed from the experiences of CCROPP and participatory contributions of community residents involved in the *Powerful People: Building Leadership for Healthy Communities* initiative. In the first two years of the initiative, over 130 community leaders from rural and urban sites in the Valley participated in the program. The sites shared similar challenges, such as high rates of obesity, poverty, low educational attainment, lack of political representation, inadequate infrastructure investment, and exacerbated challenges to accessing healthy, nutritious food and safe venues for physical activity. Despite these challenges, participants were able to actualize change in their community. They are a part of an ongoing movement of grassroots leaders creating healthier communities in the Central Valley.

Through the leadership program, participants have gained critical skills in community organizing, public speaking, media advocacy, research and policymaking processes. As a result of the leadership program, unique policy and environmental change projects have emerged. Leadership participants are sharing their learnings and best practices across sites in order to create a more powerful movement for obesity prevention. Many of the participants have gone on to take leadership positions on school or early education boards/initiatives, housing and planning committees, among other roles.
Introduction

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP IN THE SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY

California’s San Joaquin Valley is one of the largest and richest agricultural regions in the world. Despite the abundance of nutritious fruits and vegetables, food insecurity and obesity burden this region. The obesity epidemic in the Valley is disproportionately affecting low-income individuals and families who live in under-resourced neighborhoods, many of which are rural and unincorporated areas. These residents are largely people of color representing Latino, African-American and Southeast Asian communities. Residents from these neighborhoods experience limited access to healthy food and have greater access to unhealthy food and beverages than residents who live in higher-income neighborhoods in the region. This is evidenced by the scarcity of full-service grocery stores and a plethora of fast food restaurants or convenience stores. Likewise, many under-resourced and rural communities don’t have access to potable drinking water and are surrounded by a preponderance of sugary drinks.

Similar challenges exist in access to safe, physical activity opportunities. For decades, poorly designed streets and intersections lacking sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes and lighting have created unsafe opportunities for walking and biking. Likewise, the lack of public transportation options have created a dependence on driving to get to destinations. Limited parks and open space, deficient maintenance and lack of park safety, as well as poor community development have resulted in communities throughout the Valley that are not conducive to promoting physical activity and good health.

All of these challenges contribute to the region’s alarming rates of obesity and related chronic diseases creating an imperative to change policies and environments for better health. Powerful People: Building Leadership for Healthy Communities grew out of the need to address key factors which made it difficult for some individuals and families to eat healthy and be physically active and thereby achieve good health.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Leadership is the catalyst through which positive social change occurs in communities and through which a community is renewed or developed. Grassroots community leadership is authentic leadership and is essential to mobilizing a community and addressing core issues or policies affecting the health and well-being of residents. Grassroots leaders help to foster policy change by identifying challenges and organizing to work towards possible solutions. Strengthening leadership at the grassroots level can lead to healthier communities and sustained change, long after “the mobilizer” or funded group leaves. Investing in leadership development is critical and helps to create a legacy for equipping future generations with the knowledge and tools necessary to sustain a movement for healthier communities.
PROGRAM CURRICULUM AND OUTCOMES

*Powerful People: Building Leadership for Healthy Communities* is unique among other community leadership development programs because of its focus on obesity prevention through policy, systems, and environmental change efforts. Participants self identify a project which becomes the foundation or cornerstone for discussions and activities throughout the training.

The *Powerful People* program follows a distinct approach in cultivating community leaders from the grassroots level and offering real hands-on experiential training in the following key areas: community organizing, advocacy, public speaking, media advocacy, research, evaluation and policy making processes. The curriculum is designed to engage community leaders participating in the training, offering intense practice through discussions, group activities, and homework assignments.

*Powerful People: Building Leadership for Healthy Communities* is a 12-session program delivered at no cost to the participants. It is designed to help increase participants’ capacity to advocate for environmental and policy changes they would like to see in their food and physical activity environments. The participants or “emerging leaders” advocate for change as partners with schools, local governments and other institutions. Emerging leaders will exercise their role in helping children and their families lead healthier lives by learning the root causes of key community health issues and understanding as well as influencing the political and environmental factors that shape health. To grow this movement, leadership training participants should serve as mentors to subsequent leadership cohorts, building the movement by training others.

There are a range of outcomes that extend from the beginning of the leadership program and will develop and deepen over time. Here are some examples of those outcomes:

- Understand key complex socioeconomic and obesity-related community health issues causing health disparities
- Understand how land use and policies impact health
- Increase knowledge of healthy eating and active living
- Develop interpersonal relationships that lead to networking
- Acquire confidence and advocacy skills in engaging institutions and decision-makers
- Enrich thinking, inquiry and analytical skills
- Achieve personal and community transformations
- Learn tools for evaluating advocacy efforts
How To Use This Curriculum

This curriculum takes participants through a sequential approach on key topics in the leadership program. For each session you will find an overview, trainer annotated agenda, participant agenda, group development activities, handouts, homework, and evaluations. A list of resources and websites relating to each session, can be found at the very back of the curriculum behind the Appendix section.

The overview provides an introduction to each session. The trainer annotated agenda offers a step-by-step approach and tips to the trainer about how to lead each session. All participant’s should receive the participant agenda and class materials (i.e. PowerPoint presentations, handouts). This will help to provide additional and in-depth guidance on particular issues.

Each session will start off with a group development activity aimed at allowing participants to connect with one another and to hear/learn about the shared interests in the room. Group development activities are meant to strengthen the relationships and connection of the group. This is essential to building a network of advocates working together to create change in their community. Please feel free to tailor the materials and modules as you feel is necessary for your participants and the communities in which you are working in.

CCROP’s Implementation — The Powerful People leadership and advocacy program originally began in 2009 and was offered in a group setting in 11 target communities. Each class received 12 sessions (once per month) led by a qualified program trainer. The sessions were most effective when limited to 10-12 people per training who spoke the same language and when they included participants who were all from the same community. Each session is developed and presented as a two-hour training.
Engagement Tips for Trainers & Host Agencies

*Powerful People: Building Leadership for Healthy Communities* is an intense training which requires a specific set of skills from the trainer in order for leadership participants to get the most out of this curriculum. Listed below are key competencies for the trainer and the host agency.

**A TRAINER SHOULD BE:**

1. **Experienced in group facilitation.** The trainer should have experience and skills in teaching classes or facilitating discussions to grassroots community leaders.
2. **Experienced in community organizing.** The trainer should have experience and skills in mobilizing grassroots community members. In addition, the trainer must have experience in successfully working with decision-makers on community issues.
3. **Prepared to teach each lesson.** The trainer must be committed to reviewing all session materials thoroughly. The trainer must be able to make the training relevant to local needs and issues; this takes time in terms of researching historical information and current policies.
4. **Experienced in working with diverse community members.** The trainer should speak the preferred language of the participants and also have a deep familiarity of the history, contributions and perspectives of different cultural groups in order to fully understand and make relevant connections to the curriculum.
5. **Flexible and able to adapt to participant’s needs.** The trainer should be flexible with their time and in managing their hours to teach the curriculum. Leadership participant groups may want the leadership sessions to be held for a couple of hours in the evening, which may mean the trainer needs to adjust hours on certain days. Some individuals/groups may rely on the trainer to meet with them outside of the session to assist with their advocacy project or homework.
6. **Committed to completing the entire leadership program.** The trainer should be committed to complete all 12 trainings so that momentum and skill-building opportunities aren’t jeopardized.
7. **Able to communicate and network well with others.** The trainer should have experience in networking and connecting key players with the leadership participants, especially as it relates to their advocacy projects. They should have good oral and written skills and feel comfortable with initiating conversations and speaking in front of audiences.
8. **Able to connect things.** A trainer should possess the ability to listen well and connect discussions, images, media, etc. to the session topics.
9. **Able to manage the classes and keep participants on task.** A trainer should have the confidence and assertiveness to be able to operate each session in a smooth manner and ensure that participants are focusing on what needs to be done.

**A HOST AGENCY SHOULD BE:**

1. **Philosophically aligned with the goal of building community leadership.**
2. **Invested in supporting accommodations such as childcare, transportation, interpretation/translation and food/refreshments.**
3. **Supportive of allowing the trainer the liberty of flexing his/her schedule as needed.**
4. **Committed to support community residents in their local policy or environmental change projects.**
5. **Open to the idea of providing an incentive to the participants for completing the entire training.**
The Importance of Respectful Community Engagement

Community leaders are essential to building strong, healthy communities. The purpose of the Powerful People: Building Leadership for Healthy Communities program is ultimately to build the capacity of community residents to stand for themselves. CCROPP has designed this curriculum for the trainer to build a strong and productive relationship with the participating community leaders. Building these types of relationships is essential to successful policy and environmental change, and requires that the trainer engages community leaders and residents ethically and responsibly. Listed below are core values to remember when working with community leaders.

**Leveling the Playing Field** — There may be vast differences in socioeconomic and education levels between the trainer and the participants. Therefore, the trainer should not make assumptions. Host agencies should invest resources to facilitate community participation.

**Wage Replacement, Transportation, Child Care, Interpretation and Translation** — In order for some community leaders/residents to participate in the leadership trainings and related activities, the trainer may need to provide wage replacement for lost time at work, transportation to the meeting location, child care and language services for participants to be fully engaged. Arranging these types of accommodations should be considered a prerequisite for any trainer that wishes to host this program, rather than making it the community's responsibility to provide this support.

**Healthy Food/Beverage Accommodations** — Providing adequate and healthy food/beverage options for community leaders and their children is another important element of community engagement and a successful program. Meals help gain and keep good attendance, as well as reinforce healthy living.

**Meeting Locations and Facilities** — Meetings that are in community settings make child care and transportation much easier to arrange. If the meetings are being held where the target population of community leaders live, it will give them a greater sense that their participation is important. For child care, it is preferable to have the children in a separate room in order to give adult participants the chance to fully focus on the day’s topic.

**Languages and Cultures** — The trainer should be cognizant of the languages and cultures within the leadership group and use examples, terms, and words that are familiar to them. This applies to any guest speakers as well. Otherwise, this can send a misleading message that participants lack the knowledge or expertise required to participate and discourage their involvement. Provide trainings in the language that participants feel comfortable speaking. If potential participants speak different languages or the agency does not have materials or staff that can facilitate in the desired language, consider postponing the trainings until adequate accommodations have been made. Simultaneous interpretation can be beneficial in some settings, however, it is not the best approach for a re-occurring class setting.
Mission and Priorities — The trainer or agency representatives should not assume that community leaders/residents share the same priorities as the agency. Trainers/agencies sometimes make the mistake of trying to convince community leaders to care about their mission – what they are dedicated to or are paid to promote. There needs to be consideration for the possibility that everyone may not be deeply passionate about this mission and work plan. Allow your work to be driven and guided by community members. It is important to understand their frame of reference and their desired outcomes. The leadership program will help participants tap into their passion.

Celebrate Your Successes — Celebrate your successes with the community leaders/residents and other key partners who made social/community change possible. The message needs to be clear that the community and partners’ participation was essential to the progress that was made. It is important that the agency or trainer is up front about the community leaders’ success and how they as an agency and as a part of the community benefit just as much. In other words, when community members win, everyone wins.

Acknowledge Their Expertise — Create opportunities or invite community leaders to events and meetings to share their successes as presenters or panelists. This reinforces their role as experts and leaders. It is important to be clear about their role as leaders and how they might continue to promote their local work as well as influence a broader movement for healthy eating and active living.

Valuing the Commitment of Community Leaders — Value and uphold the fact that community leaders are volunteering their time and that their time is important. Be cognizant of offering too much work or inviting community leaders to an overwhelming amount of meetings or events. Consider paying community leaders by offering them a stipend for their participation in community leadership activities and for future roles of mentoring or technical assistance. This is apart and separate from wage replacement and travel reimbursement.

Keeping Connections — Maintain good connections with the community leaders even after they complete the leadership training to ensure that they receive the support necessary for their work to continue. Overall, the trainer should see the leadership program as an opportunity to build on the strengths and skills that community members have and facilitate their development as leaders. This way they can take their work to the next level of advocacy and lead in creating more opportunities for healthy eating and active living where they live.

By following this model of respectful engagement, trainers will have a greater impact on helping to address challenges that communities face.
Recruitment of Participants

The *Powerful People* curriculum is intended to develop civic engagement skills for community residents in low-income communities of color. Attention to diversity, and place-based engagement are important considerations for the recruitment of participants. As previously mentioned, attention to language needs, child care, time of the trainings, and transportation needs will assure the ability of participants to take part in a 12-session course.

CCROPP recruited community residents in each of eight San Joaquin Valley counties. Non-profit partners and public health departments who had experience with the target group assisted in identifying potential participants. Outreach in various languages through flyers, school site committees, and direct service agencies were helpful routes to engagement.

Recommendation: Invite more participants than you expect to commit to the program. That will assure a full cohort that is able to complete the curriculum and engage for the long haul in advocacy for healthy communities.

Evaluation

Evaluation is an important element in measuring the impact of the community leadership program on participants’ leadership skills acquisition and the impact that the program has had on communities. The *Powerful People: Building Leadership for Healthy Communities* initiative integrated a system of evaluation at different levels in the program.

**Personal Transformation** — Participants knowledge and skill building was assessed through session evaluations. Individual evaluation forms can be found at the end of each session. Leadership participants were also interviewed at the onset of the training and at the conclusion through pre- and post-interviews (see Appendix 1.6). The interviews allowed the opportunity for residents to describe their view of themselves as leaders and then reassess their views after the training.

**Community Transformation** — The leadership training program also creates a unique opportunity for community leaders to engage in informal community-based research. They learn to assess and evaluate the changes that need to occur in their community and then later assess what occurred through their efforts.

In CCROPP’s implementation, an outside evaluation team, Transtria, evaluated the process of determining what community engagement and community-level changes had taken place using the Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities Dashboard.